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AUTHOR Hubin, David R.; Martin, Linda C.
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ABSTRACT

The University of California at Irvine has formed subject area teams composed of paraprofessionals in order to provide a comprehensive approach to skills development programming and tutoring in subject areas. The goal of the program is to facilitate retention and academic success of students. Three teams that represent the broad discipline areas of social sciences, humanities/fine arts, and math/science are composed of student staff members who are given extensive training in the area in which they will work. A typical team is composed of two counseling assistants, one study skills advisor, and up to a dozen tutors. Counseling assistants, who are trained in counseling approaches, contact students who are either experiencing academic difficulty or are performing at a level below their aspirations. After the initial contact, the counseling assistants continue their contact with the students to facilitate effective followup. The study skills advisors work with students in small groups to improve reading skills, test preparations, test taking, notetaking, time management, and writing skills. The tutors provide direct course supplementation. This program has resulted in improved service to students and increased interaction of all staff members. (JF)

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David R. Hubin
Linda C. Martin

The University of Califonia/Irvine

Subject Area Paraprofessionals: A Team Approach

Overview

In an effort to provide a comprehensive approach to skills development programming and tutoring in subject areas, the University of California at Irvine has formed subject area teams composed of paraprofessionals. Each of the three teams, representing the broad discipline areas of Social Sciences, Humanities/Fine Arts, and Math/Science, is composed of student staff members selected and trained in one of the following service delivery functions: outreach/follow-up, learning skills counseling, or direct subject area tutoring. A typical team has two Counseling Assistants, one Study Skills Advisor, and up to a dozen Tutors. The population served by this program is all Special Services/ Educational Opportunity Program students and consists potentially of 900 students.

The goals of this program include facilitating retention of students through the delivery of comprehensive services, providing a developmental experience for the student paraprofessionals, and benefiting the professional staff by its involvement with a dynamic interaction of highly qualified students.

The primary goal of this program is to facilitate retention and academic sucess of students by functioning in a preventive intervention

manner and providing direct delivery of appropriate services. The program seeks first to identiry and contact students who are either experiencing academic difficulty or are performing at a level below their aspirations. This outreach is provided by the Counseling Assistants who, as with all area team members, come from the discipline area of their potential student population and are thoroughly trained in outreach strategies, interviewing skills and counseling approaches. The Counseling Assistants work within their discipline areas to make sure that all eligible students who might benefit from our services are personally invited and encouraged to participate. Moreover, they continue their involvement with the students and, to facilitate effective follow-up, receive progress reports from the other paraprofessionals on the team.

The two other components or the team are called Study Skills Advisors and Tutors. The Study Skills Advisors work with students in small groups or on an individual basis to improve reading, test preparation, test taking, notetaking, time management, and writing skills. The thirs component of the team is the subject area tutor who privides direct course supplementation.

The delivery of these types of services to students is not uncommon today in higher education. Most two and four year colleges provide these services through some variation of the delivery model. The choice of an "area team" concept at U.C. Irvine was based on the belief that the close interaction of individuals working within a common discipline would facilitate the achievement of our goals. With regard to our primary goal of direct delivery of a quality service, our rationale for functioning as a team was that the close interaction of these parapro-

fessionals, with their different but related services, would enlarge options in programming. For example, the tutors and study skills advisors in the Math/Science area jointly developed a workshop on problem-solving strategies. This workshop is led by a study skills advisor who discusses a general approach to problem solving. The group then splits up into its specific disciplines, e.g., physics, engineering, etc., to apply these strategies to specific problems. Another example of the close interaction of study skills advisors and tutors is in joint appointments with students. A student and both his/her tutor and and study skills advisor will frequently meet together to discuss study concerns. This type of appointment insures that the student will not receive information form one helping source which he/she cannot incorporate with other help.

The delivery of services is also enhanced by the possibility of smooth referrals among individuals who know and trust each other, and the possibility of realistic formative enaluation and follow-up. For example, a student who has missed several appointments with a tutor will be contacted by a counseling assistant. Often, the student in this situation will provide more candid reasons for this behavior than he/she might give the turo him/herself.

The program goal of providing a meaningful experience for the student paraprofessional is facilitated, we believe, by the team interaction. The different functions of each team component necessitates different emphasis within the training programs. While all area team members possess subject area competence as a prerequisite of employment, they have different outlooks on the services. For example, the study skills advisors become directly involved in learning assistance programming and therefore receive

training in learning theory and effective learning strategies. Such training allows them to act as excellent models for their counterparts who are working as tutors.

An additional rationale for the establishment of teams was to try to maximize the effectiveness of administrative efforts. Recruitment, selection and training effectiveness are enhanced by the possibility of joint programming where appropiate. For example, training issues in some areas are common to each service component within the team, e.g. cross cultural issues in counseling. Training areas that affect all aspects of a team are provided to the entire team both due to efficiency considerations and because these sessions facilitate a good team interaction.

Counseling Assistants

The counseling assistant component of the subject area team is responsible for program outreach and follow-up. The selection of the individuals for these positions is based on the applicant's personal qualities as well as his/her familiarity with a general academic area or discipline.

Training of the counseling assistant focuses on developing a thorough knowledge of the resources and requirements within a discipline area, developing interviewing and counseling skills, and developing a system for follow-up with students.

Study Skills Advisors

In our efforts to recruit Student Skills Advisors we look specifically for students who will be upper division students with at

one year's experience at UCI as of the fall quarter; who will be able to relate effectively with staff, faculty and students from a variety of ethnic and cultrual backgrounds; who will be mature, self-directed and responsible; who will demonstrate ability to learn and subsequently to relate study techniques to course content, and who have a GPA of 3.0 in their major or "area of specialization." The recruitment process is widespread and active.

The selection committee is composed of a member of the Special Services staff, the SSA coordinator, the tutor coordinator and student representatives. The selection process consists of: 1) initial screening of applications to determine that applicants meet minimum academic and class level qualifications, 2) role play exercise where the selection committee rates applicants on a series of interpersonal dimensions, 3) in-depth interviews with selected applicants, and 4) reference checks

The training component is divided into two parts: 1) an initial 30-hour training period which takes place prior to the beginning of the new academic year and 2) the on-going training which occurs on a weekly basis throughout the school year. The 30-hour component is designed to meet the needs and skill level of the selected candidates. Training includes small group, individual consultation, and individual reading work in the specific skill areas of time management, test taking, test anxiety reduction, note taking, test preparation and study reading. Students are given information about basic skills as a total group and then divided into teams to work with appropriate resource material and in consultation with Learning Skills Center staff members to adapt those basic skills for use in specific academic disciplines. Students are given the oppurtunity to practice presenting their material in the total group situation, using feedback to suggest additions and de-

letions and changes in delivery style. In addition to basic skills instruction, training includes components on what it means to be a helper, cross-cultural learning issues, cognitive style, and program development and evaluation procedures.

Additional training conducted during regular weekly staff meetings includes sessions on conducting an initial interview, how to use a study skill assessment instrument, confidentiality, referral and how to conduct a drop-in interview.

Study Skills Advisors are currently responsible to:

1) Provide learning skills support to students on specific academic disciplines through:
   a) delivery of small focus groups and
   b) individual consultation with students.
2) Work with Learning Skills Center staff to develop learning skills support programs in specific academic disciplines.
3) Be available to guide students working with self paced materials in the Learning Skills Center laboratory.
4) Engage in supervised training activites,
5) Provide appropriate follow-up with students who have participated in SSA programs.
6) Be responsible for program publicity.
7) Be responsible for outreach to potential student users.
8) Engage in on-going evaluation of their own service delivery.
9) Engage in on-going evaluation of the total team approach to service delivery and development of strategies for working together as a cohesive team.

The evaluation of the Study Skills Advisors' component is an on-

going and quarterly process which utilizes information from five different sources. Student users provide written feedback regarding the quality of the services received from the Study Skills Advisors. The Study Skills Advisors also evaluate in writing their own performance and the quality of the services they have delivered. In addition, the Study Skills Advisors provide written feedback to their supervisor regarding the effectiveness of the training and supervision they have received. Supervisory staff meetings provide an opportunity for the supervisor to assess the Study Skills Advisor's ability to conceptualize and relate to the students whom they are advising. Finally, the supervisor actively seeks feedback from other staff members who work with the Study Skills Advisors.

Tutors

The qualifications to become a subject area tutor are basically that a prospective tutor be an upper division student with a grade average of 3.0 both overall and in his/her major and that each candidate earned at least a B in any course in which he/she wishes to tutor. Moreover the candidate must have a written recommendation from a professor in that discipline area. Other specific traits sought in a tutor candidate include a willingness to participate in a team approach that necessitates extensive training and significant written follow-up.

To facilitate the early development of a team approach to the delivery of subject area supplementation and study skills counseling, the selection process is based on a team concept. The tutors are not recruited until other paraprofessional, including peer study skills advisors, have been hired. Selection committees are then formed for each of the general subject areas and these committees participate in the

recruitment and selection of tutors. The purpose of this approach is to allow the paraprofessional subject area team members who will be making referral to tutors to have confidence from the outset in the candidates chosen as tutors. The task of recruiting the tutorial component involves the team with academic counselors, advisors and professors and provides an early experience of working together. The decision to recruit tutors after the other segments of the team also reflects the fact that tutors, due to their more specialized function often tend toward a more peripheral involvement on the program.

Tutor training is divided into two segments in addition to a pro-procedural orientation. The first part of tutor training is directed at general concerns in tutoring. All tutors, regardless of discipline, are trained together in the following areas: 1) interviewing skills necessary for the first tutoring session; 2) facilitating student independence through teaching general problem solving strategies; and 3) cross cultural concerns that might affect tutoring. The other aspect of training is subject area specific and is pursued in what we call subject area meetings. These subject area meetings often are held jointly for Study Skills Advisors and Tutors and are task oriented, e.g. the development of a Math Science workshop on "Problem Solving."

The evaluation of the tutorial component utilizes four basic instruments. The student evaluates both the program in general and his/her specific tutor. The tutor, in turn, evaluates the student and the program in general. The information gained on these instruments is primarily oriented around user satisfaction and seeks suggestions for program or personnel improvement. However, these instruments also attempt to gather imformation regarding attitudinal changes and changes in a tutee's image of him/herself as a student in a particular course or discipline. These questions are asked both as a student enters and as he

or she leaves the program. Part of the rationale for these attitudinal/ self image questions is that it is very difficult to obtain hard data relating grade change to the number of hours tutored. While preliminary evidence indicates that tutoring definitely has a positive effect on grade performance, the multitude of variables make it difficult to provide hard data. It therefore, becomes significant to measure attitudinal changes to obtain quantifiable data in program effectiveness.

Program Evaluation

In addition to the service delivery evaluation which is conducted internally by each of the three components, an overall evaluation of the paraprofessional team approach includes: 1) on-going assessment of overall academic progress of both student users and student staff members; 2) assessment of the training programs for each component; 3) assessment of the impact of the team approach on program offerings and on staff members.

Assessment of academic progress includes comparison of grades and retention rates of program participants against the campus norms and informal but continuous interaction with students to assess their attitudes toward the campus and toward their academic work. The evaluation of the training is conducted both on an informal on-going basis and a more formalized quarterly basis, utilizing self-reports of student staff, input from all appropriate professional staff with contributions from the evaluations of the student users also suggesting directions for future training. We are noticing several kinds of impact on our total program. Utilizing subject-area experts has brought more breadth and subject-area expertise to the Center. The availability of this broad-based expertise allows for increased programming options.

It has also provided the impetus and creativity for increases materials development. Finally, we find that there is increased interaction between professional staff members, paraprofessional staff members and between the two groops. This increases interaction of all staff members is building trust and credibility between all staff members-- a fact which improves both the quality of our working relations and of the service delivered to the students.